

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson “Border Security: Infrastructure, Technology, and the Human Element.”

February 13, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime & Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee Hearing entitled “Border Security: Infrastructure, Technology, and the Human Element:”

“For decades, the men and women of the United States Border Patrol have been on the front lines of our border security efforts. In the wake of the attacks of 9/11, they have taken on added responsibilities in the fight against terror.

I know I join my colleagues in thanking the approximately 13,000 Border Patrol agents who work hard every day to help keep the American people safe. I have also long supported increasing the size of the Border Patrol, so we have the personnel required to manage our borders effectively.

President Bush has made a commitment to doubling the size of the Border Patrol during his term in office, which would mean adding an additional 6,000 agents over the next two years. This is an ambitious goal, and I am looking forward to hearing more about Border Patrol’s plans to recruit, hire, train, and retain these agents.

In addition, I am a strong proponent of providing Border Patrol with the technology and infrastructure they need to get their job done. At the same time, any such initiatives need careful oversight to ensure that we are making the best possible use of our homeland security funding.

As Chairman, I can assure you that the Homeland Security Committee will provide such oversight this year. As we strengthen our security along the northern and southern borders with more manpower and other resources, it is likely that our maritime borders will become an increasingly attractive target for those seeking to enter the United States illegally or to bring drugs or other contraband into the country.

Therefore, securing our nation’s maritime borders is also vitally important to our homeland security. About 95 percent of goods coming into the United States

arrive by ship, and our economy depends on a continuous flow of commerce.

Also, though our maritime borders are 12,400 miles long, there are actually 95,000 miles of coastline in the United States and 3.4 million square miles within the United States Exclusive Economic Zone.

Facilitating legitimate trade and travel while also addressing threats across this vast area is no easy task. It is up to 40,150 active duty Coast Guard men and women to protect this immense area. It is essential that these men and women have the necessary tools to be successful. Recently, however, we learned about structural problems with the National Security Cutters and the 123 foot cutters.

I am deeply concerned about these problems.

The valiant men and women of the Coast Guard, who risk their lives each day, must be able to depend on Coast Guard assets. As Chairman of this Committee, I intend to work closely with the Coast Guard to ensure that similar problems do not occur in the future. I am also committed to working with the Commandant to ensure that he has an adequate number of personnel to meet the Coast Guard's mission.

We can not afford for maritime security to be the weak link in the fight against terrorism. I look forward to continuing to work with my congressional colleagues and the Department of Homeland Security on these and many other important border security issues in the 110th Congress.”

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